

Congresswoman NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ

Representing New York's 12th Congressional District
Ranking Democratic Member, House Small Business Committee



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Velázquez Unveils National Housing Counseling Legislation

Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez unveiled bipartisan legislation to strengthen and expand housing counseling opportunities so that families in New York City and across the nation can experience the American dream of homeownership.

"The process of purchasing a home is complicated and daunting," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "With the support and guidance of housing counselors, families can successfully navigate confusing loan terms, assess closing fees, and fully evaluate the costs of purchasing and maintaining a home. Housing counseling helps ensure that families are armed with a thorough understanding of the homebuying process before they walk into a lender's office."

The Velázquez bill targets low-income families, the elderly, individuals who face language barriers and other consumers who are more vulnerable to the pred-

tory practices of unscrupulous lenders. The legislation also authorizes federal grants to provide a direct source of funding to local agencies and non-profit organizations providing housing counseling services.

In New York City, the homeownership rate is the lowest of any major metropolitan area in the country. At the same time, the default and foreclosure rate is skyrocketing in disadvantaged communities in the city and across the country, as families who were not prepared to purchase their home face high mortgage payments they cannot afford.

"Housing counseling is critical to closing the homeownership gap, and stemming the tide of defaults and foreclosures," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "It is not a panacea for curbing predatory lending, but it will ensure that future homebuyers know what is on the table and what is at stake when signing a loan to purchase their home."

Velázquez Applauds Environmental Victory for Sunset Park

Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez applauded the recent decision to reject Sunset Energy Fleet's (SEF) request to build a 520-megawatt power plant in Sunset Park.

"This was a major victory for Sunset Park – the people in this community already bear a disproportionate share of environmental hazards and the last thing they need is one more burden," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "Half of the new power plants proposed for New York City over the last two years have been slated for our district and this clustering of polluting facilities is a serious threat to the community's health and welfare. Everyone has the right to a safe, clean environment – finally a decision has been made in their favor."

The Congresswoman testified at public hearings and contacted the New York State Department of Public Service and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to voice her concerns regarding the proposal. Congresswoman Velázquez opposed SEF's proposal because it had serious health and environmental repercussions, and did not utilize public involvement. SEF had effectively re-filed its application by submitting piecemeal revisions throughout 2003, beyond a deadline. The organization ignored the intent of the law to provide meaningful opportunity for public comment.

"I am very happy for the Sunset Park community – Sunset Energy Fleet's application was rightfully rejected on the grounds of process," Congresswoman Velázquez



environmental justice issues that plague Brooklyn's neighborhoods."

Brooklyn Historical Society Celebrates Its Re-Opening

Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez joined the Brooklyn Historical Society at its ribbon cutting ceremony to reopen its building and launch its inaugural exhibition, "Brooklyn Works: 400 Years of Making a Living in Brooklyn."

Congresswoman Velázquez secured \$1 million in federal funding for the museum in 2001 to help Brooklyn Historical Society to grow, expand educational programs, incorporate new technologies to preserve historic collections, and to provide access to the museum – on-site, off-site and on-line – to Brooklynites and others in the city, and across the country.

"It is extremely important to preserve Brooklyn's history for future generations," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "This will enable individuals to

better understand our story and how Brooklyn became what it is today. I am so proud of the work done by Brooklyn Historical Society, and believe very strongly that local residents and visitors can do so much learning within these walls."

The Brooklyn Historical Society has been located in downtown Brooklyn at 128 Pierrepont Street since 1881. The museum houses over 55,000 historical images, 150,000 bound journals, and 9,000 historical objects dedicated to preserving and illuminating Brooklyn's heritage. The property has also been declared a National Historic Landmark.

"Brooklyn is one of the most multiethnic communities in America," Congresswoman Velázquez said. "Federal support has allowed local historical institutions, like this one, to endure, grow and expand so that all Brooklynites can explore their rich cultural heritage by delving into the past. History has so much it can teach us."

The Fight Continues to Reopen New York City Firehouses

In response to six city firehouses being closed last year, Congresswoman Velázquez called on the Bloomberg administration to allocate a portion of the \$400 million requested from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in its FY 05 budget proposal to reverse the closures.

“The negative consequences of these firehouse closures is apparent,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “The number of fire deaths in our city increased 23 percent in 2003, and fire response times in some areas have grown by approximately 1 minute and 20 seconds – a span that can mean the difference between life and death. The neighborhoods have experienced significant growth in recent years, and need more support, not less, to ensure their safety.”

Mayor Bloomberg’s decision to close down the firehouses last May was met with strong opposition from Congresswoman Velázquez, other elected officials, residents, and community activists. Engine Company 278 and 204 closed down, despite the growing populations they serve.

The firehouse closings also pose homeland security concerns. In Brooklyn, firehouses are key to ensuring the safety of the surrounding community, but also the city’s center of business, education, culture and tourism. Brooklyn encompasses several potential terrorist targets, such as the Brooklyn bridges, subways, courthouses and power plants.

“Given the serious first responder needs in New York City, I am urging the Mayor to designate a portion of the city’s homeland security funds to reopen the firehouses,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “The estimated cost savings from closing the firehouses was less than \$10 million, which is just 2.5 percent of the \$400 million requested by Mayor Bloomberg from the Department of Homeland Security. Neighborhoods that are experiencing tremendous growth need increased support from the city in order to protect – and even save – hundreds of thousands of lives in the future. This is a small investment to pay now in an effort to make sure that happens.”

Velázquez Helps Sponsor Local Teen’s Trip to Antarctica

Crystal Domenech, a 20-year old resident of Sunset Park, was chosen by Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez to travel to Antarctica for a two-week long expedition to learn more about global environmental issues.

The expedition was organized by Students on Ice, which provides unique learning expeditions to the Antarctic and Arctic for young people, hoping to foster a new understanding and respect for the environment among them.

“Crystal was selected because she is a shining example of the empowerment of youth, family and community,” Congresswoman Velázquez said. “She has worked with her fellow activists and with local elected officials, including me, in educating the public on the unfair siting of new power plants in low-income and minority communities in both Sunset Park as well as throughout Brooklyn.”

Since the age of 13, Crystal had been a member of the United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park (UPROSE), the oldest Puerto Rican community-based organization in Brooklyn. She was one of the founding members of UPROSE’s Environmental Enforcers, a youth group that has taken on many issues related to the environment and environmental justice.

Crystal is currently engaged in an UPROSE Urban Forestry project, and in facilitating a community design of a greenway/blueway along the Sunset Park waterfront to increase public open space. She recently attended the



certainly gives Brooklyn reason to be proud.

Grants Awarded to Our Community

**Department of Health and Human Services
Brooklyn Chinese American Association -- \$116,546**
to provide comprehensive health, educational, nutritional, and social services designed to help improve cognitive development and school readiness of low-income children

**Universal Service Administrative Corporation (USAC)
Our Lady of Perpetual Help School -- \$20,212**
to provide schools with funding to install wiring and electronic equipment needed for e-mail capability and Internet access

**Department of Health and Human Services
New York City Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene -- \$3,959,513**
to help families by supporting programs that provide free immunizations for children against vaccine-preventable disease

**Department of Housing and Urban Development
NYC Dept. of Housing Preservation and Development -- \$40,000**
to fund research on the socioeconomic factors that drive community change and influence public policy in NYC

**Department of Health and Human Services
NYC Office of the Mayor -- \$122,103,117**
to develop and organize programs that provide individuals living with HIV and their families

**Department of Homeland Security
Metropolitan Transportation Authority -- \$27,783,281**
for first responders to purchase equipment and conduct training exercises to respond to a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive attack on NYC’s transit system

The City of New York -- \$1,389,057
to complete plans, procedures, and protocols for security and emergency preparedness on NYC’s transit system

NYC Fire Department -- \$715,000
for first responders to purchase equipment to increase the capability to respond to, and recover from threats or acts of terrorism

Port Authority of NY and NJ -- \$3,762,768
for the purchase of emergency responder equipment and patrol vehicles to increase the capability to prevent, respond to, and recover from threats or acts of terrorism